

DECEMBER 1991

MISSION STATEMENT  
DEPARTMENT OF RELIGION

1. General Objectives

The Department of Religion is dedicated to the academic study of religions and other social and cultural phenomena in so far as they have been influenced or affected by religions. We are committed to the comparative study of the major religious traditions of the world as well as many minor traditions. In a world characterized by many different cultures, we are dedicated to the academic study of other cultures as well as our own in so far as these have been affected by religious traditions. At both the undergraduate and graduate level, we encourage our students to gain competent understanding of at least two religious traditions. At all levels we encourage our students to understand other cultures, different from their own either in time or in beliefs and values, from the perspective of the people most directly influenced by these cultures. This kind of multicultural study is, we believe, a valuable and increasingly essential dimension of education in a world as inter-related and

as complex as ours has become.

1. The Nature of Religious Studies

Religions are multi-dimensional realities, which include scriptures, ritual activities, legends, forms of social organizations, life styles, philosophies, and codes of behavior. The academic study of religions must, therefore, be a multi-dimensional activity. It involves the historical examination of religious movements, the literary analysis of their literature, philosophical reflection on their beliefs and teachings, the social scientific investigations of their rituals and social organization, the psychological study of their experiences, as well as ethical inquiries regarding both their moral writings and social role.

The faculty of the Department have correspondingly been trained in a number of academic disciplines including history, sociology, literary studies, philosophy, comparative ethics, psychology and theology as well as in the study of particular religious traditions.

We expect that our students will not only gain greater knowledge and more perceptive understandings of varied religious traditions. We also expect that they will increase their competency in several academic disciplines used to study these traditions and acquire the ability to articulately communicate these.

### 3. Areas of Study

We offer courses on all the major religious traditions of the world as well as a number of courses in which important areas of life are examined in relation to religion. The latter include a number of courses on women and religion, on death and dying, contemporary moral issues, religion and literature, and comparative ethics.

We teach courses and pursue research on many different religious traditions. The Department has, however, established particular strength in three areas. We developed the first Judaic Studies program in Canada. We have both an undergraduate majors and honors, but also an M.A. in Judaic Studies and a special rubric at the Ph.D. level in Judaic Studies. We have currently three full time faculty members and several part time faculty teaching in this area. We have in addition established strength in the study of South Asian religions. These include Hinduism, especially, but also Islam and Buddhism. Recently a Hindu Studies Chair was established in the Department. We have four full time faculty offering courses in South Asian religions. The Department is considering the possibility of offering special majors or honors in South Asian Religious Studies. Finally, the Department de facto possesses a measure of strength in the study of Christianity as one of the major religious traditions of the world. Four and sometimes five full time faculty members offer courses on the history of Christianity. (A majority of graduate

students, who are not in Judaic Studies, chose Christianity as one of the two religious traditions for their comprehensive examinations.) However, most of these faculty primarily work not in the study of Christianity but in other areas such as the Philosophy of Religion, Comparative Ethics, or Religion and Culture.

#### 4. Graduate Programs

We administer and share in the administration of four graduate programs; a doctoral program of 35 students, an M.A. in the History and Philosophy of Religion of 50 students; an M.A. in Judaic Studies of 15 students; and a diploma program in Theology, Religion and Ethics, co-sponsored with the Philosophy and Theology Departments of 25 students. The Doctoral and M.A. programs have been judged excellent by both outside appraisers and the university's own appraisal committee.

We are interested in strengthening these programs in several ways. We are in the process of raising the language requirements. We need to explore ways, either through Concordia or other universities, that adequate instruction for relevant language courses are provided.

Although a large number of our doctoral students are enrolled as part time students, we would like to increase the proportion who are full time. We hope to increase the number of teaching and research assistantships available for doctoral and M.A.

students to make full-time study more economically feasible for our graduate students.

We are concerned about the placement of our doctoral students. Although most of the PhD graduates have secured adequate positions, not all of our graduates have secured academic positions. We are interested in creating ways of helping them find positions. We are also interested in raising the standards for admission, course work, exams, and dissertation so that students who complete the program are indeed excellent candidates.

Our Ph.D. program is a cooperative program, jointly offered by the University of Quebec at Montreal. Some students from each program have utilized faculty or course offerings from the other departments. Each department has invited faculty to departmental colloquia and we have staged one joint doctoral students' colloquium. We are exploring ways to cooperate more fully.

## 5. Undergraduate Programs

We are committed to providing high quality undergraduate education. We are currently reviewing our undergraduate programs and offerings. The number of honors and majors have increased in the past few years, so that we now have approximately 100

honors and majors or joint majors. Still, most of the students in our courses major or honor in other departments. In this context religion courses play an important role in the University's mission to educate students to understand and live in a multi-cultural, pluralist world. We are undertaking several changes in the undergraduate programs, in order both to streamline and upgrade our offerings.

We plan to add the requirement for all honors or joint honors students that they be expected to take two one term courses, broadly labelled the Social Scientific Studies in Religion and Philosophical Studies in Religion.

We are in the process of standardizing and developing clear sequences of our course offerings, requiring pre-requisites for a selected number of courses. We are considering majors and honors programs in both South Asian Religions and the study of Christianity as a major world religious tradition.

## 6. Research and Scholarship

The Department has established a solid reputation for the research and scholarship of its faculty. Two faculty members have received Killam Grants. The Department has secured a large number of externally-funded research grants. The publishing record for the faculty is extremely high. In relation to scholarship and research, the department has developed strength in the following areas, especially: Philosophy of Religion,



Comparative Ethics, Rabbinic, Medieval and Modern Judaism, Sociology of Religion, Modern European Religious History, Islam and Women and Religion.

For the future the Department would like to reinforce and extend this foundation in several ways. We feel a need to reinforce and extend our scholarship in following areas: women and religion, biomedical ethics and Judaism. We are exploring ways to provide more adequate institutional support for our research efforts, perhaps through the creation of a research center for Religion and Culture.

#### 7. Faculty

Currently the faculty of the department are overextended. Their time and energies are taxed administering four graduate and four undergraduate programs, and advising and tutoring a very large number of graduate students. If the BGS Appraisal Committee recommendations are met, then we expect that this situation will improve over the next three or four years, when we add three new positions to the Department, including one in the area of Women and Religion for the 1992/3 academic year.

As we hire new faculty we are committed to increase the overall proportion of women faculty members so that by the year 1995 five to seven of the total faculty members in the department are women. We would also like to augment the number of faculty representing other minority groups but we have established no quotas with respect to this objective.